

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002256

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. DELISI, M. RAYNOR
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER, D. TEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2008

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MUGABE'S CHOGM ATTENDANCE IN AIR FOLLOWING
OBASANJO VISIT

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under Section 1.5(b)(d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Nigerian President Obasanjo met with opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai twice and President Mugabe once during his visit to Zimbabwe on November 17. According to MDC sources, Tsvangirai told Obasanjo during the first meeting that the MDC would be willing to participate in a transition government but that a face-to-face meeting between the leaders themselves would be required to break the impasse. Obasanjo told Tsvangirai during a second meeting that Mugabe had agreed to meet the MDC leader face-to-face but not before he could consult with his constituencies. Obasanjo was non-committal to Tsvangirai privately and in his public comments on the implications of his visit for Zimbabwe's possible participation in next month's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Abuja. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) MDC Director for Presidential Affairs Gandhi Mudzingwa on November 18 recounted to poloff details of opposition leader Tsvangirai's two meetings with visiting Nigerian President Obasanjo on November 17. Mudzingwa said Obasanjo's first call revolved around three inquiries: (1) what was the status of inter-party talks, (2) would the MDC be willing to participate in a transition government, and (3) what was the best way forward?

3. (C) Tsvangirai underscored to Obasanjo that there had been occasional informal exchanges between the parties but no substantial progress and no formal talks. He said that the MDC would be willing to consider a transition government under two scenarios: a transition government in which the MDC did not participate but which would lead to internationally monitored elections, or a transition in which the MDC played a role without regard to subsequent internationally monitored elections. The transition government would last for no fewer than six months and no more than twelve months. As for a way forward, Tsvangirai asserted that no meaningful progress would be possible without a face-to-face meeting between Mugabe and himself and a framework endorsed by the leaders for subsequent negotiation. Countless other good faith initiatives had all foundered for one reason -- the lack of mandate from Mugabe himself.

4. (C) According to Mudzingwa, after meeting Mugabe Obasanjo reported to Tsvangirai that Mugabe had agreed to meet Tsvangirai, but only after consulting with his ZANU-PF

SIPDIS

constituents. (MDC Secretary for Economic Affairs Tendai Biti told the DCM separately that Mugabe told Obasanjo only that he would think about a face-to-face meeting.) Mugabe had not indicated when the meeting could be scheduled. Tsvangirai asked Obasanjo whether Mugabe was to be invited to

SIPDIS

the CHOGM, to which the Nigerian replied only "what do you think?" Obasanjo added that he would have to consult further with his Commonwealth counterparts. (Biti reported that he said he would consult South African President Mbeki, and together they would press Mugabe for movement forward.) Mudzingwa asserted that Obasanjo left Zimbabwe with a more positive impression of the MDC and frustrated with ZANU-PF. He said that the MDC had no faith in Mugabe's professed interest in a face-to-face but had no choice but to keep "giving him rope with which to hang himself" in the international community's eyes.

5. (C) Embassy was unable to reach the Nigerian High Commission for comment and Australian High Commissioner Jonathan Brown told the DCM that the Acting Nigerian High Commissioner had been evasive during their conversation after the visit. Brown reported that Obasanjo had met separately with Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Patrick Chinamasa and Minister for National Security Nicholas Goche, both of whom had been involved in secret constitutional talks with the MDC. Commenting on the visit's potential implications for CHOGM, Brown said that Obasanjo

would report the lack of progress to Mbeki and the issue would likely be referred to the CMAG, which would not disturb the status quo. He commented that the troika had run its course and, with Malta likely to replace South Africa in the next term, probably would not receive a renewed mandate on Zimbabwe. Canadian DCM Terrence Mooney told DCM that the Commonwealth might constitute an eminent persons group composed of the troika and others -- principally a composition that would de-emphasize racial lines -- to address the Zimbabwean conundrum.

16. (C) COMMENT: Obasanjo, Tsvangirai, and Mugabe all came away from these meetings with less than they had hoped for. Mugabe appears not to have received an invitation, notwithstanding his comment to the press that he was looking forward to attending. Tsvangirai appears no closer to meaningful inter-party talks and remains suspicious of Obasanjo and Mbeki. And Obasanjo has no evidence of progress with which he can argue for Zimbabwe's readmission. At best, he and Mbeki have a difficult homework assignment in getting the parties together quickly, which would require a credible commitment to talks by Mugabe. Indeed, Mugabe's credibility gap will be an obstacle even if he publicly projects commitment to talks, as his track record and current posturing continue to evince apparent disingenuousness.

17. (C) COMMENT (CONT'D): Although the lead story on the ZBTC's November 17 nightly newscast was about gold mining, the government continues to give the CHOGM story prominent media play, underscoring its belief that an invitation remains possible. Mugabe's priority in attending testifies to his ego and a general inability to accept rejection. His government consistently portrays the issue to domestic audiences entirely in racial terms, with "racist" UK, Australia and New Zealand thwarting the will of all other members. If he cannot prevail, Mugabe likely hopes that his racial wedge will prove as disruptive to the Commonwealth as it has for his own country.

SULLIVAN